

March 1, 2009

NORRISTOWN, PA—Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) spoke at the Montgomery County Literacy Network GED presentation ceremony held at the Norristown Human Services Building on Sunday, March 01, 2009. Congressman Sestak presented Congressional Citations for the 40 students who earned their General Educational Development (GED) Diplomas. The Congressman was welcomed by Molly Lackman, President of the Montgomery County Literacy Network, and Ken Milner, Immediate Past President.

“I’m so honored to be here today with these men and women who worked hard to return to school and create bright futures for themselves, their families, and their communities,” said Congressman Sestak. “I would also like to thank those volunteers who serve at the Montgomery County Literacy Network. Their time, heart, and dedication are much appreciated.”

“Everything begins with education – a strong economy, a vibrant community, even our national security,” the Congressman continued. “When I entered the military, only one out of the five Chief Petty Officers I had as a young officer had a high school diploma. They were fine officers, and at the time that was all one needed with regard to the Navy’s technology. Today, a Senior Chief Petty Officer must have an associate’s degree from college, as they are shooting missiles thousands of miles, engaging in cyber warfare, and managing advanced information technology systems. This trend holds true in professions across the country, where education is necessary to compete in the workforce.”

Montgomery County Literacy Network connects individuals who require help with Montgomery County organizations that provide adult literacy assistance. Additionally, individuals can earn GED English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, and mathematics and writing skills.

- 1 in 5 American adults (20%) is functionally illiterate.
- About 13% of American adults 20 or over (17 to 21 million people) do not read at all or read below the 4th grade level.
- 75% of unemployed adults have reading or writing difficulties.
- 60% of America's inmates are illiterate, and 85% of all juvenile offenders have problems with illiteracy.
- Only 3 to 4 million adults with Illiteracy-related problems are reached by government programs

each year.

- 13% of all 17 year olds are functionally illiterate. Among minority youth, the figure is 44%.
- The federal government spends at least \$17 per illiterate adult to aid adult literacy efforts.
- Forty percent of adult Americans have trouble reading and writing even simple things.
- Forty percent of the fully illiterate are between the ages of 20 and 39; 28 percent are ages 40 to 59; and 32 percent are over 60.
- The United States ranks 49th among 156 United Nations member countries in its literacy rate - a drop of 18 places since 1950.
- 75 percent of unemployed adults have reading and/or writing difficulties.
- 60 percent of all juvenile offenders have problems reading.
- \$5 billion is spent each year on welfare and unemployment compensation due to illiteracy.
- Illiteracy costs the United States more than \$225 billion a year in lost productivity. It is tied to unemployment, crime, poverty, and family problems.

Congressman Sestak's Efforts to Support Literacy

- Congressman Sestak strongly supports funding for Reading is Fundamental (RIF), which improves literacy in elementary school children by providing free books through the U.S. Department of Education's Inexpensive Book Distribution Program.
 - o He supported a letter requesting a continuation of FY 08 funding at \$26 million for FY 09.
 - o Additionally, he co-sponsored H.R. 4449, the Prescribe a Book Act. This legislation would authorize a five-year \$85 million federal pediatric early literacy competitive grant program based on the successful Reach Out and Read (ROR) program, which he has also strongly supported funding for over the last several years. This organization emphasizes early literacy through physician-sponsored reading programs. Clinicians discuss and encourage reading to children during examinations, and donate a book to each child age six months to five years. In addition, ROR volunteers read to children in waiting rooms before appointments.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.

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